

1.0 Summary

1.1 Description of the Proposal

The Washington State Department of Natural Resources is proposing a landscape plan for approximately 15,660 acres of forested state trust lands in the Lake Whatcom Landscape Planning Area, as identified in Map A-1 and A-2, Appendix C.

1.2 Objective of the Proposed Action

The proposed action is the adoption, by the Board of Natural Resources, of a landscape plan for state trust lands in the Lake Whatcom Landscape Planning Area in accordance with the policies of the 1992 Forest Resource Plan.

1.3 Need

The Department needs to prepare a landscape plan that will guide both short-term and long-term management of state trust lands in the Lake Whatcom Landscape Planning Area, consistent with DNR's Forest Resource Plan (1992), DNR's Habitat Conservation Plan (1997), Forest Practices Rules, and the Engrossed Second Substitute Senate Bill 6731 (E2SSB 6731) [2000 Washington Laws Ch. 205] passed in the year 2000.

1.4 Purpose

The purpose of the landscape plan is to develop a management strategy that will provide environmental protection on DNR-managed lands and contribute to water quality in the planning area, while also preserving the economic viability of those same lands for the long-term benefit of the trust beneficiaries.

1.5 Relationship to Ongoing and Future Regulatory and Planning Efforts

Activities on state trust lands in the Lake Whatcom Landscape Planning Area will be guided by the Landscape Plan but also will be influenced in the future, at least in part, by:

- Design of individual state timber sales and road planning;
- Any updates to the 1992 Forest Resource Plan;
- Implementation of a long-term conservation strategy for marbled murrelet that is to be developed under DNR's HCP, once two-year "occupancy" surveys for marbled murrelet in designated habitat is completed;

- Implementation adjustments, if any, to DNR’s Habitat Conservation Plan;
- Outcomes of the planned Washington State Department of Ecology, TMDL study and subsequent regulatory action relative to 303(d) listed water bodies;
- Future rule changes to the Forest Practices rules.

In addition, a Watershed Management Plan is being prepared for the Water Resource Inventory Area 1 (WRIA 1), which includes Lake Whatcom. Proponents of this plan include Whatcom County, City of Bellingham, PUD 1, Lummi Nation and Nooksack Tribe. The Watershed Management Act is a recent law that allows local agencies and citizens to develop a watershed management plan specifically related to local water resource circumstances and needs. The Watershed Management Plan will be the blueprint for managing water resources in WRIA 1, outlining policies and programs to manage water supplies, protect water quality, and restore fish habitat over the next 20 years. Formal notification of the scoping process for the Watershed Management Plan under the State Environmental Policy Act (SEPA) was published July 3, 2002.

1.6 Summary of the Draft EIS and Major Conclusions

Alternative Courses of Action Considered (1.6.1.)

A set of objectives was identified for this landscape. Four sets of alternative management strategies were developed based on these objectives. A fifth alternative is based on comments received during public scoping; this alternative does not incorporate all of the landscape objectives identified by DNR and the Lake Whatcom DNR Landscape Planning Committee. The five alternatives are:

1. **No Action.** This alternative incorporates the Department’s existing policies, legal requirements and management commitments, including but not limited to the Forest Resource Plan, Forest Practice Rules and Habitat Conservation Plan. This alternative is consistent with the Tier 3 alternative identified in DNR’s statewide sustainable harvest calculation.
2. **Legislative Requirements.** This alternative adds the legislative requirements of E2SSB 6731 [2000 Washington Laws Chapter 205] to the No Action alternative. It reduces the geographic area available for active forest management.
3. **First Alternative to #2.** This alternative, developed by the Committee, further reduces the geographic area available for active forest management, increases the number of trees retained after harvest and lengthens the harvest rotation age. It also increases the coordination with tribes to protect cultural resources.

4. **Second Alternative to #2.** This is the second alternative developed by the Committee. It further reduces the geographic area available for active forest management and further increases the trees retained and harvest rotation age.
5. **Restoration Alternative.** This alternative was developed by the Committee in response to comments received earlier during the public scoping process. This alternative pursues a restoration approach that focuses on restoring older-forest conditions, with limited, short-term silvicultural activities, and that relies on non-traditional means of securing alternative revenue to meet the trust revenue objectives.

Summary of Impacts and Significant Adverse Impacts that Cannot be Mitigated (1.6.2)

A summary of impacts will be developed later in the Draft EIS process and discussed relative to the preferred alternative. Impacts are discussed for each alternative in section 4.0 of this document.

Mitigation Measures and their Effectiveness (1.6.3)

Mitigation measures will be summarized and discussed in the Draft EIS relative to the preferred alternative. Identification of potential mitigation measures is included in the discussion of the alternatives in Section 4.0 of this document.

Significant Areas of Controversy and Uncertainty, if any, and the Issues to be Resolved, including Environmental Choices among Alternatives (1.6.4)

These issues will be summarized and discussed further in the Draft EIS relative to the preferred alternative. Areas of uncertainty have been identified and included in the discussion of alternatives in Section 4.0 of this document.

Significant Impacts that will Narrow the Range or Degree of Beneficial Uses or Pose Long-term Risks to Human Health or the Environment (1.6.5)

A summary of such impacts will be developed later in the Draft EIS process and discussed relative to the preferred alternative. Potential long-term impacts are identified and discussed for each alternative in section 4.0 of this document.

Phased SEPA Review (WAC 197-11-060(5)) (1.6.7)

The Department plans to use the input gained from expanded scoping through this PDEIS to develop a formal Draft EIS that will be released for public review approximately June 2003. [This date is subject to change.]

The Department plans to submit the final Lake Whatcom Landscape Plan Proposal and the final environmental impact statement to the Board of Natural Resources in roughly October or November 2003. Implementation of the Lake Whatcom Landscape Plan will follow approval of the Lake Whatcom Landscape Plan Proposal by the Board.

The Lake Whatcom Landscape Plan Proposal is being developed under the direction of the 1992 Forest Resource Plan, DNR's Habitat Conservation Plan, and 2000 Washington Laws Ch. 205. The Proposal builds on the analysis of the Final EIS for the Forest Resource Plan and Final EIS for DNR's Habitat Conservation Plan.

2.0 Introduction

2.1 Purpose of the Preliminary Draft Environmental Impact Statement

This Preliminary Draft EIS (PDEIS) was written by the Department to gain public input on the range and nature of alternatives to be analyzed in the Draft EIS, and on the categories of analysis planned in the draft. It is consistent with expanded scoping options allowed in the State Environmental Policy Act (SEPA) requirements.

The EIS process is a tool for identifying and analyzing probable adverse environmental impacts, reasonable alternatives, and possible mitigation. Through the EIS process, areas of controversy and other significant issues are identified early when the opportunities to consider a broad range of solutions are greatest. Due to the level of controversy around management of state trust lands in the Lake Whatcom Landscape Planning Area, the Department of Natural Resources identified an EIS as one way to provide adequate input and analysis for the responsible official and the Board of Natural Resources to use in making a well-reasoned judgment about potentially significant impacts associated with forest management activities.

Once the Board of Natural Resources adopts the final proposed Lake Whatcom Landscape Plan, the plan will guide the Department in managing 15,660 acres of state trust lands in the Lake Whatcom Landscape Planning Area.

2.2 The Department's Legal Obligations

The Department has a legal duty to produce long-term income for specific trusts, which are the trust beneficiaries. State trust lands in the Lake Whatcom Landscape Planning Area are managed for the Scientific School (Washington State University [WSU]), Capitol Building, Agricultural School (WSU), Common School (K-12), Forest Board Transfer (Whatcom and Skagit counties), and Forest Board Purchase (Whatcom County) trusts. Revenues from Forest Board lands help support county services through junior taxing districts, and benefit the state general fund. The largest beneficiaries of the Forest Board Transfer and Purchase trusts are the Bellingham and Mount Baker school districts, and Whatcom and Skagit county road funds, and the state general fund.

The Department complies with the Washington State Constitution; numerous state statutes, including the Multiple Use Act, Forest Practices Act, Shorelines Management Act, and State Environmental Policy Act; and federal laws, including the Omnibus Enabling Act of 1889, the Endangered Species Act and the Clean Water Act.

The Department is also complying with special state legislation, E2SSB 6731 [2000 Washington Laws Chapter 205], regarding landscape planning in the Lake Whatcom Landscape Planning Area.

2.3 The Board of Natural Resources

The Board of Natural Resources is a part of the Department of Natural Resources, and establishes policies to ensure that the acquisition, management and disposition of lands and resources within the Department's jurisdiction are based on sound principles. The Board will be asked to approve the final Lake Whatcom Landscape Plan. Implementation of an approved Landscape Plan by the DNR will follow approval of the proposed plan by the Board of Natural Resources.

The Board is composed of six members: the Commissioner of Public Lands, who chairs the Board; the Governor or the governor's designee; the Superintendent for Public Instruction; the Dean of the School of Agriculture and Home Economics, Washington State University; the Dean of the College of Forest Resources, University of Washington; and a county commissioner or council member from a county that contains Forest Board land.

2.4 Lake Whatcom DNR Landscape Planning Committee

DNR has been working with numerous groups to develop a landscape plan, as guided by 2000 Washington Laws Chapter 205.

The Lake Whatcom DNR Landscape Planning Committee, an inter-jurisdictional committee comprised of representatives from Whatcom County, Water District 10, City of Bellingham, Washington State Departments of Health, Ecology, and Fish & Wildlife; the Lummi Tribe, and two private citizens, was formed to provide input to DNR during the planning process. The Committee was charged by the Legislature to advise DNR as the department completes a landscape plan for state lands around Lake Whatcom. The Legislature identified a number of topics to be addressed in the landscape plan, including protection for streams and unstable slopes.

In addition to the Lake Whatcom DNR Landscape Planning Committee (hereafter called the Committee), DNR is consulting with other major forest landowners, the Lake Whatcom Management Committee and the Forestry Forum, watershed residents, other organizations, the Nooksack and Lummi Tribes, and state and local elected officials.

2.5 Lake Whatcom Landscape Planning Area: an overview

The Lake Whatcom Landscape Planning Area encompasses approximately 15,660 acres of state trust lands in western Whatcom County.[See Map A-1 and A-2 in

Appendix C.] The planning area lies immediately east and southeast of the City of Bellingham, and includes lands within the Lake Whatcom watershed boundary, a block of lands west of Cain and Reed Lakes, and small, isolated parcels immediately adjacent to the watershed.

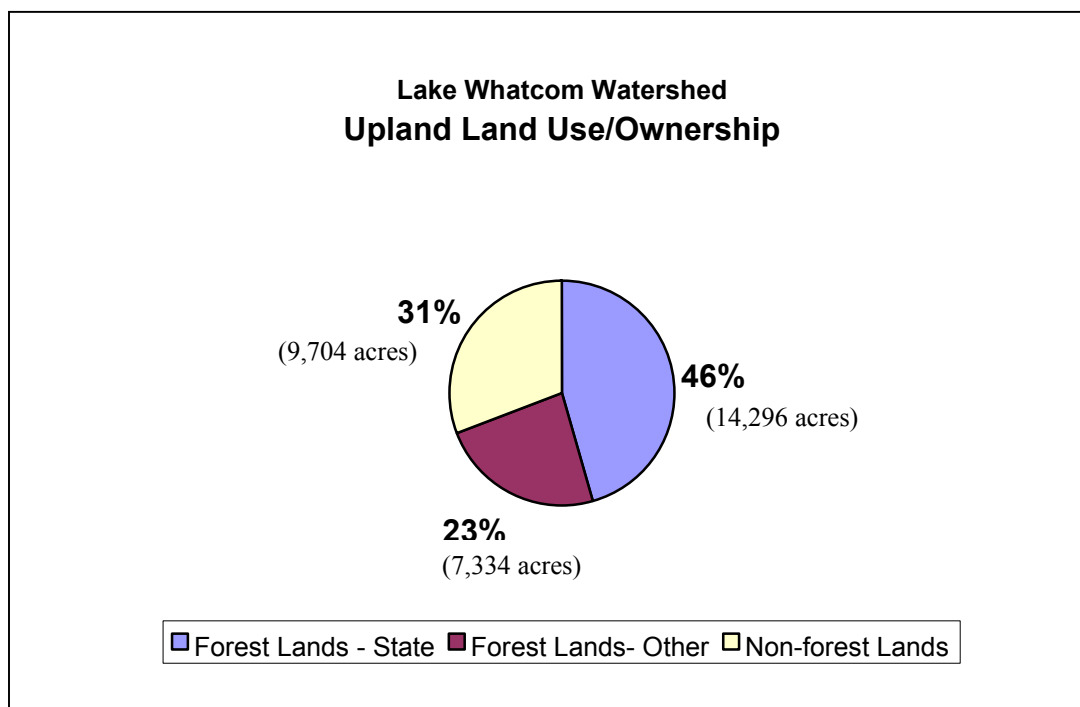


Figure 1: Upland Land Use/Ownership Pattern in the Lake Whatcom Watershed.

The Lake Whatcom Landscape Plan applies only to State trust lands within the landscape planning area.

2.6 Income from State Trust Lands in the Lake Whatcom Landscape Planning Area

State trust lands in the Lake Whatcom Landscape generate revenue for seven different trusts. The number of acres in each trust is shown below in Table 1:

Table 1: Trust acres in the Lake Whatcom Landscape, by trust.

Trust	Acres	Percent
Forest Board Transfer Lands (Whatcom County)	8,423	54
Forest Board Transfer Lands (Skagit County)	690	4
Forest Board Purchase Lands (Whatcom County)	881	6
Common School (K-12)	4627	30
Agriculture School (WSU)	193	1
Capitol Buildings	286	2
Scientific School (WSU)	557	3
Total trust acres	15,657	100

2.7 Document organization

Section 3 explains the planning process in greater detail and lays out the draft alternatives currently being considered for the Lake Whatcom Landscape Plan. This section also identifies alternatives that were considered but not carried forward for analysis.

Section 4 provides a description of the affected environment, followed by an analysis of any probable significant impacts of each alternative.

Maps referenced in the PDEIS and/or its appendices are included in Appendix C.

Technical assessments and other documents produced for DNR and the Committee to help in developing the alternatives and in writing this document are provided in Appendix D.